

MARINE CORPS INTERWAR PERIOD INNOVATION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UPCOMING POST OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM PERIOD

A Monograph

by

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ABSTRACT

MARINE CORPS INTERWAR PERIOD INNOVATION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR
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Over the last 237 years the Marine Corps has used innovation, ingenuity, and determination to provide the United States with a forward thinking, relevant military capability. The periods between wars have shown a flurry of creative and at times desperate activity by the Marine Corps. Three particularly active periods were post World War I, post World War II, and post Korean War. After World War I, Major General John A. Lejeune worked on updating a force based on lessons learned fighting in the American Expeditionary Force while steering the organization towards the development and refinement of amphibious doctrine and equipment. The Marine Corps would from that period forward define itself as an amphibious force.

The accolades the Marine Corps received during World War II for direct actions in the Pacific Theater and indirect contributions to amphibious activities in the European Theater were not enough to ensure survival of the organization in the post war downsizing era. General Alexander Vandegrift found himself in a similar position to Lejeune and again focused efforts on improving the Marine Corps amphibious capabilities simultaneously developing and integrating the newly invented helicopter into operations. Activities post World War II proved prescient for the Marine Corps and provided a capability that General Douglas MacArthur used effectively to conduct a surprise amphibious assault that turned the tide of the war.

Capitalizing on the success of the Korean War, the Marine Corps parlayed amphibious success into a forward deployed capability that again found a niche within the Department of Defense and the National Security Strategy. The Marine Corps evolved amphibious forces into a continuous presence deployed globally that is able to conduct operations with little or no notice. Not merely fighting for existence for perpetuity's sake, key Marine Corps leaders' stewardship allowed it to fill a critical position that was both required by the nation and incapable of being adequately addressed by the other services.

Doctrine, amphibious heritage, and a culture of boldness and innovation have served the Marine Corps well during critical interwar periods. However, the upcoming post-war situation may prove to be more challenging than anything the Marine Corps has faced to date. The Marine Corps must possess the institutional agility and boldness to face and overcome challenges that have the potential to reduce or remove altogether the Marine Corps and with it the amphibious capability currently serving as a strategic shaping asset within the national security strategy.

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INTRODUCTION

The Marine Corps has struggled for survival at least 15 times during its 237-year history.¹ During these times of existential crisis, strong leadership, initiative, and ingenuity have ensured a place for the Marine Corps in America's strategic defense policy. The present day ability to provide amphibious forces deployed continuously worldwide is a direct evolution of the amphibious doctrine developed during the interwar period between World War I and World War II. The Marine Corps' ability to provide such forces was a key reason it avoided absorption into the Army. Likewise, the capabilities those forward deployed forces provide were a result of a few creative and bold Marines who developed doctrine, tactics, and a way of fighting that has generated combat forces that are relevant throughout the spectrum of conflict. The most innovative of periods came at the most critical moments for the Marine Corps. Products that were generated during those crisis moments have had a disproportionate impact on American military might during subsequent wars and conflicts. With an examination of Marine Corps organizational activities between WWI, WWII, and the Korean War interwar period trends emerge. These trends can be extrapolated within the strategic context of each period and compared to the upcoming interwar period that will occur once the war in Afghanistan is concluded. The question remains as to whether the Marine Corps is institutionally prepared to address upcoming challenges in the way it did in previous interwar periods.

The Marines of WWI fought alongside Soldiers of the U.S. Army and, despite some uniform and minor organizational differences, were indistinguishable. That interchangeability was crucial to success in a violent and fluid fight in the Meuse-Argonne but could have proven fatal to the institution of the Marine Corps during the inevitable post war draw down. The Marine Corps approached the interwar years of 1918 until 1944 as an opportunity to find a niche that was

¹ Victor H. Krulak, *First to Fight: An inside View of the U.S. Marine Corps* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1999), 13.

both critical to the nation's military might heretofore under or non-represented. The most obvious of these institutional efforts was to design, develop, and validate amphibious doctrine. The Marine Corps identified the need for amphibious doctrine by critically analyzing the most likely and most dangerous of potential enemies. The U.S. saw Japan as the only true threat to its aspirations across the vastness of the Pacific and developed a war plan specifically to address potential conflict with them. War Plan Orange was largely conceptual in nature, focusing primarily on the ends and leaving the ways and means of waging war in the Pacific yet to be determined.² With an understanding of the operational environment and the problems within, the Marine Corps developed an operational approach that required the ability to seize and hold advanced naval bases. This operational approach, termed 'leapfrogging,' required forces deployed across the Pacific to hold expeditionary logistical nodes, airfields, and ports in order to provide the necessary support to conduct follow on attacks eventually reaching the Japanese mainland. Because of the failed amphibious expeditions in Gallipoli, operations against a hostile force entrenched along a shore were commonly believed by most competent military minds to be unfeasible or downright impossible. Undeterred, the Marine Corps embarked on an institutional path that staked its very existence on the premise that amphibious operations against a hostile force could be done, but only with sufficient success to defeat the Japanese on their own territory. By developing amphibious doctrine, as well as the shipping and equipment capabilities to execute it, the Marine Corps made possible not only the victory in the Pacific but also the numerous landings in the European theater that were critical to victory.³

Simultaneous to the amphibious developments, the Marine Corps captured lessons learned from not only WWI but from all the minor, or small, conflicts it had participated in since

² Dirk Anthony Ballendorf and Merrill L. Bartlett, *Pete Ellis: An Amphibious Warfare Prophet, 1880-1923* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute, 2010), 113.

³ Joseph H. Alexander, *Storm Landings: Epic Amphibious Battles in the Central Pacific* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1997), 27.

its inception. Alongside the codifying of amphibious doctrine at the Marine Corps Schools in Quantico, Virginia, a separate group wrote a manual that provided doctrine and best practices for the operations of military forces within less-than-major war operations. Defeating insurgent forces, humanitarian relief efforts, security operations, foreign internal defense, and even external government development were topics covered in the *Small Wars Manual*. The creative efforts of the Marine Corps during the interwar period between WWI and World War II provided military solid amphibious doctrine with associated equipment, an operationally focused Marine headquarters and field command structure, and a manual for conducting and participating in low intensity conflicts to defend American interests abroad.⁴

By the end of World War II in 1945, amphibious operations were a valid and versatile capability within the American arsenal of war fighting. The close of the war, though, brought nuclear weapons into strategic planning considerations. Nuclear weapons were an economical alternative to large standing armies. Many in Washington viewed both the use of nuclear weapons and their deterrent effect as removing the necessity of potentially costly amphibious landings against opposed beaches.⁵ Unfortunately, nuclear weapons, if used against an amphibious assault, would be fatal to the concentrated forces required to breach the defenses. The Navy, likewise vulnerable to nuclear weapons and shrinking budgets, was rapidly transitioning focus from amphibious capabilities to large, carrier, and submarine forces geared towards open ocean domination. Consequently, amphibious doctrine and capabilities required an update to include a more distributed operational approach. During WWII, the Navy was able to provide enough amphibious shipping to conduct multiple divisional operations in separate theaters (Pacific and

⁴ Clifford, *Progress and Purpose: A Developmental History of the Marine Corps 1900-1970*, 27.

⁵ Ibid, 54.

Europe). Nevertheless, because of the rapid decommissioning of the fleet between 1945 and 1950 the Navy struggled to provide enough amphibious shipping for a two-division assault on Inchon.

The efforts between 1945 and 1952 to refine amphibious doctrine in a nuclear age and the development of helicopter operations doctrine were critical to the survival of amphibious doctrine and by association, the Marine Corps. Despite a clarified mission resulting from the National Defense Security Act of 1947, the Marine Corps still faced serious fiscal and relevance issues within a nuclear American military.⁶ While defending itself within the Department of Defense, the Marine Corps also worked steadily with lawmakers in a bold attempt to solidify its role by seeking to establish legislation codifying its core capabilities, structure, organization, and mission.⁷ These efforts would help to provide the Marine Corps permanence in role and mission that was still in question despite WWII successes. However, even with considerable congressional support, the Marine Corps suffered significant downsizing cuts between 1945 and 1950.

Shortly after the 1947 Department of Defense reorganization, and in the midst of the Marine Corps' efforts to establish a specialized niche in America's defense establishment, the U.S. found itself embroiled in the Korean War. U.S. military forces initially suffered a succession of defeats and setbacks often attributed to unprepared, ill-equipped, and poorly motivated forces. The rapid advance of enemy forces and the ferocity of combat operations in Korea required a quick and dramatic response from the U.S. General Douglas MacArthur, Commander-in-Chief of the United Nations Command in Korea, proposed an amphibious operation to attack the North Korean flank as an effort to regain lost ground and to reclaim the initiative lost during the early

⁶ James D. Hittle, "The Marine Corps and the National Security Act," *Marine Corps Gazette*, October 1947, 57.

⁷ Krulak, *First to Fight: An inside View of the U.S. Marine Corps*, 53.

and critical stages of the war. Despite the drastic fiscal and structural cuts, the Marine Corps was able to field, equip, and deploy an amphibious force to support MacArthur's bold plan.

At what seemed the lowest point in that war, General Douglas MacArthur envisioned Marines conducting a bold and complicated assault against the North Koreans with an amphibious landing at Inchon in 1950, codenamed Operation CHROMITE. Personnel, equipment, and materiel assembled, loaded on to amphibious shipping, and set sail almost immediately while Marine amphibious planners embedded in MacArthur's staff to work out the complex problem of an opposed landing of two divisions in the rear of the enemy. Despite the complexities, the Marine amphibious force landed on time, at the prescribed location, and achieved the desired effects while maintaining a follow on employment capability that allowed for sustained and successful ashore operations. One of the key components of this success was the deliberate action taken by the Marine Corps during the interwar period from 1945 to 1950. Operation CHROMITE served as the opportunity to cement a position for the Marine Corps and amphibious capabilities in America's defense strategy.

Amphibious operations, doctrinally represented by the Marine Corps as a means of delivering overwhelming combat forces to contested beaches in order to secure advanced naval bases, have evolved to encompass many other missions since the Korean War. The performance in Korea solidified the Marine Corps' role as a rapid, amphibious, response force. Subsequent legislation in 1952 codified the Marine Corps' mission and structure. The National Security Strategy has changed since 1952, though, and now emphasizes preventing, not just prevailing in, conflicts.⁸ Amphibious capabilities and operations have likewise morphed to include a constant deployment capability that provides a global presence. Additionally, amphibious force

⁸ White House, *National Security Strategy*, report (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2012), 27.

capabilities include strategic shaping missions like humanitarian assistance, disaster recovery, partnership activities, and regional assurance and deterrence activities as well as forcibly entry.⁹

Similar to pre and post Korean War years, the Marine Corps faces challenges as the nation enters another interwar period. Following the end of Operation Iraqi Freedom and the planned end of Operation Enduring Freedom, the attendant budgetary constraints, troop reductions, and overall decrease in the military budget once again present challenges for the Marine Corps to navigate. The strategic mission of the United States has shifted along with its priorities and all the services are working to ensure relevance in the post-Afghanistan military.¹⁰ Roles, missions, and most especially budget allocations are becoming more contested between the services. Military capabilities have been developed, budgeted, and planned around large scale, high intensity conflicts against potential peer enemies, the assumption being that anything less than full scale combat can be handled with those forces already available. The justification for the funding, structure, and doctrine for amphibious operations are in place today in large part due to the careful navigation of interwar periods by the Marine Corps. The current structure and organization of the Marine Corps is designed to support the far extreme of combat operations. However, the reality is that amphibious capabilities are being used routinely for much less than what they were originally designed for. The Marine Corps' challenge will be maintaining relevance while amphibiously focused forces are called upon to do anything but amphibious operations. During the upcoming post-war era and undoubtedly interwar period, the potential for inter-service fratricide raises. Restricted budgets, rising costs, aging equipment, and a complex operating environment conflate into a complex problem that could easily see the Marine Corps once again struggling to justify its existence along with the need to maintain a robust amphibious capability. A more detailed examination of interwar period actions post WWI, WWII, and Korea

⁹ Leed and Moody, vii.

¹⁰ White House, *National Security Strategy*, 30.

can provide insight into the action necessary to shape the decisions and strategic path the Marine Corps should take to ensure its continued relevance within America's defense forces.

POST WORLD WAR I

Prior to WWI, the Marine Corps' mission primarily involved serving as ship's guards and providing defense of naval bases. The rapid expansion of the U.S. military in preparation for WWI included the Marine Corps, which expanded fivefold during the war, and deployed over 30,000 Marines to Europe and other locations to support U.S. efforts. Additionally, the Marine Corps, in coordination with the Navy Department sent more than 1,600 Marines ashore to augment naval security at bases and ports. The Marine Corps' performance during WWI, specifically at the battle of Belleau Wood, established it as a formidable fighting organization that was respected by allies and enemies.¹¹ Despite its performance after WWI, the Marine Corps struggled to uniquely identify itself from the Army. Congressional and Presidential efforts to downsize the military establishment quickly identified the Marine Corps as merely a second land army and therefore potentially redundant. This designation quickly marked it as a target for efficiency-based reorganization that would see the Marine Corps absorbed into the Army. An antiquated staff organization, ill defined and indiscriminate mission set, and continually loosening ties with the naval services presented an identity crisis for the Marine Corps that if not handled smartly would justify the Army's insistence on the removal of a duplicative capability.¹²

¹¹ Robert Debs Heinl, *Soldiers of the Sea: The United States Marine Corps, 1775-1962* (Baltimore, MD: Nautical & Aviation Pub. of America, 1991), 204.

¹² Robert Debs Heinl, *Victory at High Tide: The Inchon-Seoul Campaign* (Annapolis, Md.: Nautical & Aviation Pub. of America, 1979), 7.

Amphibious Shipping Limitations

Post WWI, the potential of a destructive and distracting naval arms race prompted international initiatives. The U.S., Great Britain, Japan, France, and Italy worked together via treaties to prevent an economically destructive shipbuilding program for each of their countries.¹³ Together, these countries established strict regulations on shipbuilding as well as the overall size of each country's fleet. To the benefit of the Marine Corps, the Washington Naval Treaty did not stipulate a limitation on naval mobile infantry forces, which may be attached to, or held in reserve, with the fleet. The omission prompted the Commandant of the Marine Corps, Major General John Lejeune, to propose that the size of the Marine Corps should be a reflection of the missions and operations assigned.¹⁴ The correlation of force size directly to anticipated force assignments would become the hallmark of Marine Corps end strength management until present day. At the time though, the concept was innovative and allowed Major General Lejeune to quickly justify every Marine, piece of equipment, and dollar spent in support of the Marine Corps' contribution to national defense. The Commandant focused his efforts on even more definitively clarifying and identifying the Marine Corps' mission uniquely within the United States military and firmly establishing naval roots.¹⁵

Headquarters Reorganization

A lesson learned from WWI that required immediate attention was that the pre-war organization of Marine headquarters and field units did not support large formations or the anticipated functions of the Marine Corps in a post-war era. Prior to WWI, the Commandant with

¹³ George H. Knowles, *The New United States: A History Since 1896* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1960), 229.

¹⁴ Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millett, *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 56-57.

¹⁵ Clifford, 28-31.

the help of three or four of his aides managed the entire operation of the Marine Corps. Experience while serving with the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) showed the benefit of the Army staff system which was embraced and adopted by General Lejeune on 1 December 1920, in a Headquarters Marine Corps reorganization that has essentially remained unchanged to today. These primary changes allowed the Commandant to focus on strategic vision and direction while dedicating sufficient staff to the operations and performance of the Marine Corps. At the field headquarters level, reorganization took on the functional distinction of duties and by 1925, tables of organization were provided to the brigades that depicted distinct sections focusing on functional areas: B-1 Personnel, B-2 Intelligence, B-3 Operations and Training, and B-4 Supply. The B represented brigade and was replaced with an R for regimental staffs, which by 1936 had staff sections that reflected all four key duties. The reorganization at all levels allowed for better interface and operations with the Army and Navy while supporting independent operations of units either ashore or at sea. In essence, each Marine unit had the capability to function efficiently despite separation from support or administration of higher headquarters. The independent nature of staff functions would be critical to the implementation of amphibious doctrine.¹⁶

Amphibious Roots

The potential threats to the United States in the 1920s were Mexico, Europe, and Japan. The military designed war plans to develop and explore the particulars required to fight these prospective enemies in their respective theaters. For interwar planners, Japan represented the most probable enemy and a challenge as its territory spread across the enormous spaces of the central Pacific Ocean. Lieutenant Colonel Earl “Pete” Ellis, author of *Operations Plan 712 “Advanced Base Force Operations in Micronesia”* traveled throughout the Pacific area from

¹⁶ Kenneth W. Condit, John H. Johnstone, and Ella W. Nargele, *A Brief History of Marine Corps Staff Organizations* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1971), 10-11.

1921 through 1923 studying the ramifications of a potential war within the area and outlined not only the recommended Marine role but also the best way to defeat the Japanese, if required.¹⁷

Ellis' work offered a valid mission tied to a geographic theater along with a specific enemy. He pointed out that because of unique coral reef configurations located at prospective landing sites, shore conditions, tidal implications, and defensive measures, specific amphibious training and equipment were going to be required. These requirements translated into the Higgins Boat, amphibious tractor, and the doctrine developed at Marine Corps Schools that defined amphibious operations during WWII.¹⁸

As organizational efficiency, a clearly identified threat, and an unambiguous mission matured, the Commandant focused his efforts in 1922 towards validation of his efforts during fleet maneuvers. The Commandant felt that "these...maneuvers offered excellent opportunities in respect to troop and staff training and testing of equipment and other material."¹⁹ The opportunity to try and fail allowed Marines to obtain the knowledge that would prove critical to successful amphibious operations in World War II. Interestingly, most of the senior commanders in the 1940s were company grade officers during the fleet maneuvers of the 1920s, learning and improving with the training opportunities provided by increasingly complex fleet maneuvers. By 1925, a simulated landing of 42,000 Marines conducted amphibious operations off the coast of Hawaii. The normal school activities in the Field Officers School in Quantico were suspended so that students and staff could participate in the exercise. Lessons learned varied from recommendations for a better tactical organization to uniform changes. The constant flood of after

¹⁷ Earl H. Ellis, *Operation Plan 712J - Advanced Base Operations in Micronesia*, report (Quantico: Marine Corps University, 1921),

¹⁸ Ballendorf and Bartlett, 120-121.

¹⁹ Clifford, 31.

action recommendations for the fleet maneuvers was the insistence by all participants that a suitable landing craft be designed, built, and integrated into the amphibious force.²⁰

The Marine Corps needed an historical example to focus its efforts while developing mission and equipment capabilities. The only major example of amphibious operations at that time was the British invasion of Gallipoli, which was a dramatic failure. The British calamity at Gallipoli in 1916 led many military theorists and professionals to categorize amphibious operations against fortified defenses as impractical at best and impossible at worst.²¹ Conducting numerous experiments and training exercises throughout the 1920's and early 1930's, the Marine Corps slowly gained the experience and justification to continue to develop doctrine and capabilities. Major General Ben Fuller, Commandant from 1930 to 1934, recognized the potential demise of the institution because of an inability to distinguish itself from the Army. At the height of the budget crises brought on by the Great Depression, the Commandant turned his Marine Corps towards the task of codifying the lessons learned regarding amphibious warfare. In 1931, the staff of the Marine Corps Schools in Quantico developed the most comprehensive and detailed textbook on amphibious doctrine to date. Published and implemented into lessons at the schools in Quantico in 1934, the "*Tentative Manual for Landing Operations*" made an immediate and lasting impact resulting in a reorganization and refocus on amphibious operations across the entire organization. This amphibious force doctrine tied closely to the "advanced base force" mission originally established in 1900 and identified a unique niche that was both necessary for national security and justifiable during budget and organizational downsizing. The Commandant's transformation included specifying forces in an effort to align more clearly their mission and capabilities. Additionally, the Commandant officially changed the "Expeditionary

²⁰ "Recommendations Based on Report of Critique on Joint Army & Navy Problem No. 3," Officers of Marine Corps Schools to Commandant of Marine Corps Schools, June 5, 1925, Marine Corps Schools, Quantico, VA.

²¹ Murray and Millett, 57.

Force” into the “Fleet Marine Force” in 1933. Shortly afterwards, the Corps resumed fleet landing exercises, feverishly working to refine and further validate the newly minted doctrine and organization.

With doctrine and Marines available, the Navy needed amphibious shipping to operate within the littoral areas under the new doctrine. Treaties and a tacit agreement between Congress and the Navy to focus efforts on warships, vice auxiliaries, hampered the Navy’s shipbuilding plan before 1940. The fall of France and the “Two Ocean Navy” Act of 1940 broke the logjam on shipbuilding and resulted in merchant ships converted for use as transports. The first amphibious specific ship was built in 1942 and was designated the Landing Ship, Tank (LST). The Landing Ship, Dock (LSD) shortly followed in 1943. The Marine Corps finally had functionally focused shipping assets.²² The Higgins boat, amphibious tractor, and Marine aviation all were developed, refined, tested, and integrated into amphibious operations to create a comprehensive doctrine that proved essential to the success of the naval advance across the Pacific during WWII. More importantly for the Marine Corps, amphibious capabilities afforded a unique role that tied it directly to the Navy while providing sufficient justification for budget and organizational objectives.

Small Wars Doctrine

Simultaneous to the development of amphibious doctrine was the codifying of hard lessons learned while fighting insurgencies and lesser conflicts. The Marine Corps Schools once again provided the expertise and personnel that developed into the *Small Wars Manual* published in 1940. The early twentieth century saw the Marine Corps serving in many capacities all over the world as the United States police and initial reaction force. Because of this, the Marine Corps was heavily involved between the 1890s through the 1930’s in the Banana Wars in Central America

²² Murray and Millett, 84.

and the Caribbean. Participation in the irregular warfare built an experience base in guerrilla war, counterinsurgency, policing, and humanitarian efforts that was important and needed to be codified and made available to the schools.²³ The manual, originally envisioned in 1922 by Major Samuel M. Harrington who at the time was a student, provided a definitive treatise on the subject titled “*The Strategy and Tactics of Small Wars.*” The Commanding Officer of Marine Corps Schools in Quantico in 1922 was Colonel Ben Fuller, who recognized the importance of Major Harrington’s work and once acquired numerous copies and directed the staff to immediately incorporate the material into the school curriculum.²⁴ The subsequent course provided lessons on landing operations, seizure of cities, and operations in the field as they pertained to small or irregular wars. Innovative at the time, this courseware was the first of its kind to present a focused education on the conduct of irregular warfare in the Marine Corps and the United States military as a whole. As the course evolved, the material was refined and eventually published in 1940 for general use as the *Small Wars Manual*.²⁵

POST WORLD WAR II

The Marine Corps took its amphibious and small wars doctrine, newly developed equipment, brand new amphibious fleet, and the hard earned education and training won through the development process of the 1920’s and 1930’s and fought WWII. Despite successes and an earned reputation for bravery, creativity, and commitment to mission success in the face of significant challenges, the Marine Corps found itself at the conclusion of WWII in an institutional quandary. The invention of nuclear weapons and the military revolution it ushered in seemingly

²³ Nicholas J. Schlosser, "The Marine Corps' Small Wars Manual," *Fortitudine* 35, no. 1 (2010): 4-9.

²⁴ "Request for Copy of Thesis," Colonel Ben Fuller to Major S.M. Harrington, October 16, 1922, Marine Corps Schools, Quantico, VA.

²⁵ Clifford, 38.

left no place for conventional forces, let alone highly vulnerable amphibious landing forces that converged dangerously close while conducting an assault.²⁶

Consequently, the Marine Corps had to adjust to the reality of a nuclear enabled military. From 1945 to 1950, President Truman focused the ever-dwindling defense budget on nuclear and air power. The defense budget for 1948 proposed by the services was \$30 billion; President Truman approved \$14.2 billion.²⁷ The budget cuts drastically reduced war-making capabilities while simultaneously shrinking forward projection and amphibious capabilities and reflected the desire of the American public to put the thoughts of war behind them and focus on domestic matters. The U.S. government attempted to define what war in the atomic age would look like and in the summer of 1946 set up a series of tests under the purview of the Navy. These tests, code named Operation CROSSROADS, took place in Bikini Lagoon in the western Marshalls. The tests conducted included the detonation of two atomic bombs, one airborne, and the other underwater, amidst a fleet of unmanned and obsolete warships. The display proved that an amphibious assault against nuclear weapons using existing equipment and tactics would prove disastrous for the assaulting force. The senior Marine present at the testing, Lieutenant General Roy S. Geiger, wrote immediately to General Vandegrift, Commandant of the Marine Corps, expressing deep concern stating, “with an enemy in possession of atomic weapons, I cannot visualize another landing such as was executed at Normandy or Okinawa.” This prophetic statement directly led to a flurry of activity which translated into the creation of a special board to ascertain what was needed to orient the Marine Corps in the right direction, away from the last war and towards the next one.²⁸

²⁶ MacGregor Knox and Williamson Murray, *The Dynamics of Military Revolution, 1300-2050* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 86.

²⁷ Heinl, *Victory at High Tide: The Inchon-Seoul Campaign*, 6.

²⁸ Clifford, 71.

Helicopter Development

The Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Alexander Vandegrift, assigned Major General Lemeul C. Shepherd, Jr., Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps; Major General Field Harris, Director of Aviation; and Brigadier General Oliver P. Smith, Commandant of the Marine Corps Schools the task of analyzing the future of amphibious operations in a nuclear world. In 1946, the tasks to the Shepherd Board, named after its senior member, were as follows: employment of helicopters for ship-to-shore movement, damage effects of the explosion of an atomic bomb, and special equipment for amphibious operations.²⁹

The board delivered its preliminary findings in December of that same year. While pursuing all available technology and predicting forthcoming developments, the board quickly concluded that the helicopter, although not ideal, was critical to amphibious operations in the nuclear age. The board believed that the speed of the helicopter, carried by amphibious transports and LST's, could maintain the dispersion necessary to reduce the exposure of atomic attack. If the amphibious force contained sufficient helicopter assets, the vertical envelopment could deliver Marines in the flanks or rear of a hostile position. Resupply for the helicopter borne force would consist of palletized supplies delivered in or near supply points requiring only limited handling. The board identified characteristics and capabilities required for future generations of helicopters to better integrate them into amphibious operations. The board also concluded that the introduction of the helicopter into amphibious doctrine would improve on the characteristics of mobility, responsiveness, and breadth of amphibious operations, in turn improving the lethality of operations from the sea. The board subsequently recommended the establishment of a program for the use of helicopters in the Marine Corps: that an experimental squadron should be organized and equipped with 12 helicopters of the first available type and that a study of the techniques,

²⁹ Lemeul C. Shepherd, Jr., *Special Board Report*, report (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Navy, Headquarters United States Marine Corps, 1946).

tactics, logistics, and other phases of ship-to-shore movement by helicopters include military requirements for future helicopter design.³⁰

Within three days, the Commandant of the Marine Corps concurred with the board's results and forwarded them officially to the Commandant of Marine Corps Schools, Brigadier General Oliver P. Smith, who had been a member of the board. The Commandant directed the Marine Corps Schools to, "conduct an immediate study of the employment of helicopters in an amphibious operation," and to present, "a tentative doctrine for helicopter employment, and the military requirements of a helicopter specifically designed for ship-to-shore movement of troops and cargo." Giving Smith carte blanche with his product, General Vandegrift closed the directive with authority to propose complete revisions of the Table of Organization as well as prescribed equipment and any recommendations regarding changes to organizations, types of arms, equipment, and supplies that should be included.³¹ The Commandant visualized significant changes resulting from integration of helicopters and directed Smith to incorporate all aspects of change required of the Marine Corps and amphibious operations to survive and excel in a nuclear environment.

The years between 1946-50 brought a flurry of activity in Quantico regarding helicopter development allowing for the integration of helicopters into the amphibious force. By establishing the first Marine helicopter squadron, Helicopter Marine Experimental 1 (HMX-1) in Quantico, the unit was collocated with the Marine Corps Schools and thereby better able to evaluate, test, and develop doctrine, tactics, and techniques. Tests included the employment of helicopters in combat as well as their integration into amphibious operations. Helicopter testing proved as exhaustive as it was extensive. Cold weather operations conducted in Newfoundland at

³⁰ Shepherd, Jr., *Special Board Report*.

³¹ "Helicopter Doctrine Development," CMC to Commandant, Marine Corps Schools, December 19, 1946, Marine Corps Schools, Quantico, VA.

one extreme climate and tropical conditions off the coast of Puerto Rico at the other extreme measured the effectiveness of this new capability in a variety of environments. The successful use of Marine helicopters during the 1949 American withdrawal from China validated the operational usefulness of this new equipment.

Once again, the Commandant tasked Marine Corps schools in Quantico to develop doctrine that would define the Marine Corps' employment of helicopters for the near and foreseeable future. Tasked with writing a doctrine to employ a technology when only a couple of hundred helicopters were in existence in 1948, one author, then Colonel Victor H. Krulak, stated "we had so little to go on, no data; just conviction."³² Despite all the resource and developmental shortfalls, *Amphibious Operations - Employment of Helicopters (Tentative)*, which came to be known as PHIB-31, was produced by Marine Corps Schools and used for the PACKARD II amphibious exercise late in 1948. Integrating lessons learned from the exercises, an initial effort to codify helicopter doctrine and update existing amphibious literature was endorsed by the Commandant as doctrine in November of 1948. PHIB-31 became the baseline for not just Marine Corps aviation but was also the manual the Army airmobile division utilized while developing its own helicopter doctrine.³³

1947 National Security Act

In defense of another of Lieutenant General Victor Krulak's critical moments in 1947, the Marine Corps established the self-proclaimed Chowder Society. Formed around a loose coalition of Marines, the Chowder Society was tasked to identify and convey clearly to Congress and America the mission and relevance of the Marine Corps. It met informally and discussed,

³² Clifford, 77.

³³ Ibid, 78.

debated, and published papers regarding the role and future of the Marine Corps.³⁴

Unapologetically engaging representatives in Congress, the Chowder Society members lobbied for legislation that would preserve the Marine Corps not only in its existence but that would also specify the organizational structure and missions that clearly and uniquely identified what the Marine Corps' part in fighting America's wars would be. These efforts culminated in the specific verbiage included in the Defense Reform Act of 1947.

Working to clarify the implications of the reorganized Defense Department, the United States worked with allied partners after 1947 to conduct numerous amphibious operations. The coalition training exercises afforded opportunities for the Marine Corps to use and refine its tactics, techniques, and doctrine. However, despite the success and criticality of amphibious forces in both the European and Pacific theaters of war, the future of a United States amphibious capability remained a strongly debated topic between WWII and the Korean War. Having tied itself tightly to amphibious operations over the previous thirty years, the Marine Corps was quickly identified as a one mission force that, in the wake of nuclear weapons, had become largely irrelevant. Post WWII, the President's goal was to return the defense budget back to a reasonable amount that would best support the economic expansion of the U.S. while reorganizing the defense department in light of the post WWII realities that America faced.³⁵

The American people encouraged significant budget reductions and the White House was eager to oblige. The interwar period between 1945 and 1950 proved a significant fight for the survival of the Marine Corps and the Commandant, Lieutenant General Vandegrift was determined to lead a coherent and convincing narrative to ensure its continued existence. The "*No Bended Knee*" speech was an impassioned presentation detailing the Marine Corp's long history

³⁴ Gail B. Shisler, *For Country and Corps: The Life of General Oliver P. Smith* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2009), 77.

³⁵ Clifford, 76.

of fighting through adversity and doing what was asked of it by the United States. In many cases, those actions were neither the cheapest nor the easiest but despite the difficulty or challenges, the Marine Corps had consistently provided America with what was needed, when it was needed. The speech, given by Vandegrift to Congress in 1946, established definitively the Marine Corps interwar narrative but unfortunately added fuel to an ongoing Congressional debate regarding the restructuring of the War and Navy Departments. Vandegrift's speech sparked a visceral response from the President and Congress regarding the role and capabilities of the Marine Corps in a nuclear America.³⁶

The efforts of the Chowder Society, the Commandant, and the Marine Corps Schools staved off the budget ax while providing a justifiable mission set. The results of those efforts to lobby for Congressional support, establish a succinct and relevant mission set, and have on hand the doctrine and equipment to execute applicable tasks assigned were realized in the National Security Act of 1947. The new law implemented sweeping changes that resulted in the consolidation of the Departments of the Army and Navy, thereby merging them into the Department of Defense, the establishment of the Central Intelligence Agency, and the separation of the Army Air Corps from the Army and establishing it as a separate service called the United States Air Force. Additionally, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the National Security Council were established. Although the respective roles and responsibilities would change over subsequent legislation, the basic framework of the executive branch's security apparatus remained intact. Among these changes, the service's roles and responsibilities were clearly established.

Based on lessons learned from WWII, the Marine Corps, through the Chowder Society, targeted specific individuals within Congress to serve as advocates for an amphibious force capability within the newly formed Department of Defense. The establishment of the Air Force

³⁶ Alexander Vandegrift, "No Bended Knee" (speech, Senate Committee on Naval Affairs, Washington, D.C., May 6, 1946).

allowed President Truman to decide definitively that nuclear weapons would singularly be under the Air Force. Despite the struggle between the Navy and Air Force, the Marine Corps, primarily because of the efforts of the Chowder Society, walked away from the National Security Act of 1947 with a definitive mission and purpose:

The United States Marine Corps, within the Department of the Navy, shall include land combat and service forces and such aviation as may be organic therein. The Marine Corps shall be organized, trained, and equipped to provide fleet marine forces of combined arms, together with supporting air components, for service with the fleet in the seizure or defense of advanced naval bases and for the conduct of such land operations as may be essential to the prosecution of a naval campaign. It shall be the duty of the Marine Corps to develop, in coordination with the Army and the Air Force, those phases of amphibious operations which pertain to the tactics, technique, and equipment employed by landing forces. In addition, the Marine Corps shall provide detachments and organizations for service on armed vessels of the Navy, shall provide security detachments for the protection of naval property at naval stations and bases, and shall perform such other duties as the President may direct: Provided, that such additional duties shall not detract from or interfere with the operations for which the Marine Corps is primarily organized. The Marine Corps shall be responsible, in accordance with integrated joint mobilization plans, for the expansion of peacetime components of the Marine Corps to meet the needs of war.³⁷

Despite the clarification and designation as the sole proponent of a permanent amphibious capability, the Marine Corps was denied a permanent seat at the newly formed Joint Chiefs of Staff and was denied status, budgetary and organizationally, as a single and unique service from the Navy.

Amphibious Shipping

Codifying the fact that the Marine Corps is an amphibious force with a specific mission was one accomplishment; however, the fight to ensure enough amphibious shipping assets were made available by the Navy was as critical and nearly as difficult a battle. The end of WWII saw a United States military with over 12 million men and women in the U.S. armed forces, over 92,000 aircraft, over 1,300 warships, and over 82,000 landing craft. The United States military

³⁷ Hittle, "The Marine Corps and the National Security Act", 58.

establishment in 1945 was the largest it had ever been and would likely ever be.³⁸ Maintaining the military was unsupportable both financially and politically after WWII, therefore, and a rapid downsizing effort undertaken almost immediately after the cessation of hostilities. The question that was hotly debated by all services was what to cut and what to retain in a post war world that left the United States as one of a very few world powers. The debate over resources accompanied the often-violent disagreement over service roles and functions. The last budget approved by Congress before the outbreak of the Korean War only allowed for 238 naval combatants, including six aircraft carriers, fourteen reduced-strength Army divisions, and only forty-eight of the seventy-one air groups deemed critical by the Air Force. The Navy found itself fighting every corner to include internal budget disputes over Marine requirements for amphibious shipping.

Neither the Navy nor the Army saw amphibious operations as a novel challenge that required a unique and specific force designed especially for that particular operation. With doctrine and best practices developed, the Army proved at Normandy that amphibious operations no longer had to be the sole purview of one service. In 1947, Generals Eisenhower and Spaatz secretly proposed to the Joint Chiefs of Staff the removal of all aviation assets from the Marine Corps, which were to be sent to the newly formed Air Force, and reduced to lightly armed infantry and the absorption of the amphibious assault role in to the Army. President Truman strongly criticized the Navy, which was suffering from the political backlash of the unfettered access to President Roosevelt for continuing to expect a ‘favored’ status within the Defense Department. Due to this bias, the Navy found itself fighting an uphill battle during every budget, organization, and mission discussion within the executive branch.³⁹

³⁸ Edward J. Marolda, *The U.S. Navy in the Korean War* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2007), 15.

³⁹ Heinl, *Victory at High Tide: The Inchon-Seoul Campaign*, 5-7.

The Navy consistently maintained throughout the WWII to Korea interwar period that a balanced military establishment that placed neither a particular service nor a weapon system as paramount over all others was in the best interests of the United States. However, it consistently lost that argument. Despite strong objections from the Chief of Naval Operations, Louis A. Johnson, Secretary of Defense after James V. Forrestal, canceled the construction of the new aircraft carrier *United States* (CVA-58) effectively denying the Navy the ability to deliver nuclear weapons from carrier aircraft.⁴⁰ This decision determined by default that the Air Force would be the sole purveyor of nuclear weapons, severely marginalizing the role of carrier assets and thereby further justifying additional force and budgetary cuts. As the newly minted Air Force staked out its territory, the Army was consistently arguing that amphibious operations were not unique to the Marine Corps. Given the number of amphibious operations the Army conducted during WWII, this was a valid opinion. The Navy struggled to define itself in an environment that presented numerous organizational challenges simultaneously negotiating the budget process that severely hampered its ability to adequately resource its diverse portfolio of missions. Submarines, amphibious shipping, surface warfare, and carrier aviation all competed for the same slice of defense budgeting. To complicate matters, the shipbuilding plans had to incorporate all functions of naval character. Amid these competing interests, there consisted the internal struggle of priority between the ‘green’ amphibious navy and the ‘blue’ deep-water navy.⁴¹

Given the Army and Air Force’s derisiveness regarding amphibious operations, it was understandable that the Navy viewed amphibious warfare as a distraction to its core mission, resulting in many upwardly mobile naval officers actively avoiding amphibious duty.⁴² Because

⁴⁰ Ibid, 7.

⁴¹ Carl H. Builder, *The Masks of War: American Military Styles in Strategy and Analysis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 134.

⁴² Ibid, 130-135.

of this, there were a low percentage of officers selected for promotion or command while serving in amphibious positions which thereby created a shortage of experienced amphibious officers.⁴³

Not just short of amphibiously qualified officers, the lack of ship availability also served as an indicator of the drastic budget cuts and the shift in the Navy's priority during the interwar years. The wartime high of amphibious ships was 610, which dropped to 362 by 1947, and by 1950 was at a low of 91. The amphibious planning staff estimated that fifty Tank Landing Ships (LST) would be required for the assault on Inchon. The Navy could provide seventeen of which very few were fully combat capable. The Fleet Marine Force (FMF) steadily decreased and in 1948 was at 35,086 Marines and by 1950 was down to 23,952.⁴⁴ Even more significant were the overall numbers of Marines in the active force in 1950. Between 1945 and 1950, the Marine Corps was quickly drawn down from a post war 485,053 active Marines to 155,592. This dramatic downsizing was primarily due to the efforts of the Secretary of Defense, Louis A. Johnson, who personally directed a cut of thirty-three percent manpower from the Marine Corps. The questionable necessity of an amphibious capability in a nuclear age became another reason for the downsizing of the Marine Corps. As the Commandant argued about how successful the Marine Corps was during WWII conducting primarily amphibious operations, he was in essence furthering the opposition's argument for the disbanding of the Marine Corps based on the ineffectiveness of any amphibious operations in a nuclear environment.⁴⁵

The nuclear age brought on a dramatic shift in strategy, which resulted in operational and tactical shifts throughout the services. The National Security Act of 1947 allowed for a separate

⁴³ Heinl, *Victory at High Tide: The Inchon-Seoul Campaign*, 5-15.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 7.

⁴⁵ Tristan T. A. Lovering, *Amphibious Assault: Manoeuvre from the Sea: From Gallipoli to the Gulf; a Definite Analysis* (Woodbridge: Seafarer Books, 2007), 389.

and distinct Air Force that took on the primary responsibility for the management of the United State's nuclear arsenal.⁴⁶ Subsequently, the advent of nuclear technology left all of the other services scrambling for relevance. The threat of nuclear attack on naval vessels required a new look at distribution and protection of the fleet while bringing in question the need for future amphibious capabilities. An amphibious force is most vulnerable during the initial landing stages; therefore, employment of a nuclear device by the enemy would be most advantageous either off shore attacking the exposed amphibious force while embarked or during the approach to shore. The Marine Corps continued to develop amphibious doctrine during the interwar period as an effort to promote limited engagements as a method of preempting nuclear attack by ensuring the U.S. retained the ability to conduct operations at less than full-scale war.⁴⁷ Thus, the Marine Corps was able to capitalize on the operational environment of the interwar period and further its relevance in support of national security.

Amphibious Experience

Skilled personnel experienced in the arts of amphibious operations are no less of a requirement than adequate ships. Amphibious experts must be available in sufficient numbers to execute landing operations effectively and to integrate forces within the overall war effort. The necessary skill is a product of special training, immersion in amphibious techniques, and constant practice in synchronizing the different elements comprised in such a force. When comparing the execution of amphibious operations in the European Theater, and the Pacific Theater a few explanations for the better performance of the Pacific force's landing operations became clear. African, Sicilian, and Italian landings suffered from hitches and delays stemming primarily from

⁴⁶ Shisler, 118.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 114.

the lack of experience with amphibious operations by the Army.⁴⁸ Additionally, the difference of view regarding operations between Army and Navy forces contributed to the friction. The operations performed in the Pacific Theater, while not perfect, suffered significantly less friction between the forces because of the shared culture of the Navy and Marine Corps team.⁴⁹

The Marine Corps' continued doctrinal development and testing efforts prior to WWII made them not only the nation's but the world's expert in all things amphibious. The continued refinement of doctrine consumed a large part of the intellectual capacity of the Marine Corps and, despite a lack of ships and money for training, became a constant beacon for the institutional focus. All things related to the Marine Corps had to directly correlate with an amphibious application. The purchase of a new weapon system, tank, plane, helicopter, truck, or mobile kitchen had to be tied to an amphibious mission set or was deemed unnecessary or superfluous. Experience when preparing for combat operations is invaluable, even more so when regarding amphibious operations. With the accelerated deployment timeline, the commander of the Marine element of the amphibious landing force was to be General Oliver P. Smith, a combat experienced leader who was not only proficient in his craft but was at the forefront of doctrine development and the integration of helicopters in amphibious operations while at the schools in Quantico.

THE KOREAN WAR

Despite the frantic and productive work of the Marine Corps, many in the upper echelons of the military establishment were still confident that amphibious operations, due to both nuclear weapons and significantly shrinking budgets, were either impossible to conduct or no longer difficult enough to have a service solely focused on them. The testimony to Congress in 1949

⁴⁸ Alexander, 27.

⁴⁹ Heinl, *Victory at High Tide: The Inchon-Seoul Campaign*, iv.

provided by General Omar Bradley punctuated the opinion of the future of amphibious operations when he said, “I also predict that large-scale amphibious operations...will never occur again.”⁵⁰ Infighting between services continued including struggles between the Navy and Marine Corps while the newly minted Air Force fought for relevancy and funding. This strife created a perfect storm that resulted in an underfunded, understaffed, and ill equipped, yet over tasked military that when compared to WWII was a pale comparison. Post World War II brought a drop in interest at the national and sister service levels for amphibious warfare. The Navy saw it as a drain, the Air Force viewed it as unnecessary, and the Army felt it could be picked up as an additional task to be performed by any of their units. However, when the requirement for an amphibious force to deploy and employ came from MacArthur in the summer of 1950, only the Marine Corps had the requisite planning and execution skills to meet the accelerated timeframe required for the operation.

1952 National Security Act Amendment

The success of the Marine Corps in Korea provided a rare opportunity to solidify its position in the defense establishment. Having argued vigorously that amphibious operations were a thing of the past, the Army and Air Force after the Korean War were weakened by the obvious success of General MacArthur’s flanking maneuver, planned and executed by Smith and the 1st Marine Division. The time to press the advantage could not have been better and efforts to solidify the Marine Corps position in the Department of Defense pushed forward when the amendment to the National Security Act was passed in June 1952. The purpose of the document was to more clearly define the functions and missions of each of the services. Most importantly for the Marine Corps the following provisions were codified for the Marine Corps:

- (1) The strength of the Marine Corps should be not less than three combat divisions and three air wings.

⁵⁰ Heinl, *Victory at High Tide: The Inchon-Seoul Campaign*, 4.

- (2) The Commandant of the Marine Corps should have co-equal status with the members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in matters of direct concern to the Marine Corps.⁵¹

Significant to the Marine Corps is that this amendment elevated the Commandant to full access to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Subsequently, within the first year of the law being passed, the Commandant attended 84 meetings of the Joint Chiefs, which focused on 175 items he deemed of importance to the Marine Corps. Aside from the Commandant, the new status for the Marine Corps allowed other Marines for the first time to serve on committees of the Joint Chiefs of Staff such as the Joint Strategic Plans Committee and Joint Logistics Plans Committee.⁵²

The Evolution of Amphibious Operations

Amphibious operations have evolved significantly since Major General Lejeune identified them as key and critical capabilities for the Marine Corps in the 1920s. Amphibious forces consist of certain capabilities and attributes that make them uniquely identifiable within the United States military. In 2011, the Center for Strategic & International Studies identified eight key capabilities that amphibious forces possess: breadth, variable visibility, responsiveness, scalability, lethality, autonomy, mobility, and persistence. Additionally, amphibious forces provide two additional capabilities through the synergy of the other eight: flexibility, and versatility.⁵³

Breadth refers to the range of military functions, both separately and in combination, as a part of a combined arms force. Breadth affects responsiveness, especially in the early stages of an operation when requirements can vary or be uncertain.

⁵¹ U.S. Department of State - Historian, "National Security Act of 1947," Office of the Historian - Department of State, section goes here, accessed February 10, 2013, <http://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/NationalSecurityAct>.

⁵² Clifford, 81.

⁵³ Leed and Moody, 15.

Variable visibility is the ability to raise or lower the identifiable profile of the U.S. military presence as the situation dictates. Amphibious forces working with countries who wish to downplay their cooperation with the U.S. can lower their visibility by simply changing location. In other situations, a highly visible presence may be required to serve as a deterrent and again through relocation the amphibious forces can make themselves very visible.

Responsiveness refers to the speed with which various elements of an amphibious force can deliver desired effects. Because of the forward-deployed nature of forces afloat, they can typically respond faster than many like capabilities based in the United States. With a little advanced warning, the force can reposition to shorten response time even further.

Scalability is defined as the disaggregation and re-aggregation at the functional level that the current amphibious forces structure allows and that units are trained to operate within. The traditional three-ship Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) consists of a 2,200-person task force that can be task organized to operate from one or two ships based on the mission set required. Additionally, multiple MEU's can be combined with minimal delay or interruption of capabilities. A Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB), approximately a 20,000-person task force, can serve as the next echelon of capabilities, which has equipment prepositioned afloat with personnel to be flown in to a location secured by the MEU or other forces. Finally, the Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) is the largest standing combat organization of the Marine Corps and can be as large as 60,000 Marines task organized based on the mission. The scalability of the Marine amphibious forces makes tailoring the right force for the mission far less complicated.

Lethality is the ability for each amphibious force from a sub component of the MEU element to a MEF or larger to be organized and equipped based on the mission and still have the ability to strike decisively at an opponent. Capabilities readily available even at the lowest level include organic fixed-wing fighter-attack aircraft, tilt-wing helicopters, tanks, armored vehicles, artillery systems, as well as traditional personal and crew served weapons organic to an infantry

unit. The ethos of “Every Marine a Rifleman” additionally provides that every member of the task force is fully capable of employment in that capacity, a contingency that has been proven throughout the Marine Corps’ history.⁵⁴

Autonomy of amphibious forces provides an ability to operate with little to no shore-based infrastructure for extended periods. Austere in nature, the amphibious force retains the ability to adapt to local infrastructure conditions should they become available. Mobility is provided by the nature of being a sea-based force and offers a large degree of latitude to be repositioned with relative ease either pre- or post-operation or incident. Persistence is the ability to remain in a geographical location for extended periods and is particularly beneficial when the start or end of an operation is unknown.

Flexibility is defined as the ability to conduct multiple different types of missions within a given deployment. It is derived principally from the wide range of functions available to the amphibious force (breadth), the ability to custom tailor a combined arms force package based on the needs of the mission (scalability), the ability to engage in combat operations with a hostile force (lethality), and that force’s ability to operate with or without associated shore infrastructure (autonomy). Versatility is related but distinct from flexibility and reflects the amphibious force’s ability to support multiple activities, potentially of completely different mission sets, simultaneously or close in time.⁵⁵

Collectively, these ten attributes represent features that make the modern amphibious force relevant as a strategic-shaping force. The amphibious force, while designed specifically for one purpose - the seizure and defense of advanced naval bases - has evolved into a capability that operates across the entire spectrum of conflict. Despite this, the amphibious force is often viewed as a singularly focused asset that current anti-access, area-denial technology makes too costly an

⁵⁴ Ibid, 12.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 14.

endeavor. The argument often presented by those desiring to cut amphibious capabilities for quick budget wins questions the potential of an opposed landing given the current operating environment. The longer America goes without having to conduct a forcible entry amphibious operation the more difficult the argument to retain the capability becomes. Operation CHROMITE proved that such an assumption was previously incorrect and only through the desperate efforts of the Marine Corps to retain a capability was it available when required.

Since 1950, amphibious operations have grown beyond the kinds of forcible entry operations used in the Korean War and WWII to include humanitarian assistance and disaster relief missions (HA/DR), partnership activities, regional assurance and deterrence missions, as well as combat related operations. While it can be argued that other types of forces can be made available to conduct these types of operations, the attributes listed above outline the ability of amphibious forces to not only accomplish the assigned mission but to be available to conduct other dissimilar missions as directed. The forced entry capability critical to WW II and the Korean War are not viewed as a completely justifiable requirement within today's operational environment. However, a consistent forward presence amphibiously postured has been a constant requirement over the last fifteen years. In 2010, Marine Corps amphibious forces supported over 50 exercises with foreign military training conducted in five separate geographical regions. During the last five years, 13 Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) missions and 11 Regional Assurance and Deterrence (RA/D) missions required amphibious forces due to the one or a number of restrictions that made air or land based options less desirable.⁵⁶ The strategic shaping benefits of an amphibious force have been emphasized during the last two decades while simultaneously downplaying the forced entry capability that the amphibious forces were originally designed to conduct has been significantly downplayed by the Marine Corps. Access

⁵⁶ Ibid, 2.

denial weapons now readily available to most countries have made ship to shore on opposed beaches cost prohibitive both in equipment and in casualties.⁵⁷ The challenge faced by the Marine Corps is whether to continue to focus on the development and deployment of a force capable of a certain mission when that same force has historically been tasked with the “lesser included” missions.

POST IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN

Fiscal Challenges

Once again, the transition out of conflict and into the interwar period brings renewed threats to the Marine Corps’ relevance. Past successes in combat, regardless of how dramatic or significant to the overall war, will not be enough to stave off the post-war manager’s budget crunching. As with every post war period, the civilian leadership will require the armed services to cut back. The implementation of reductions is subject to the discretion of the individual services. Much like the interwar periods previously discussed, the Marine Corps has an opportunity to shape its destiny and to defend the institution’s relevance. The challenges of the future are not so different than those faced by Marine Corps leaders in the 1920’s, 1930’s, 1940’s, and 1950’s. A constrained budget, the rising costs of equipment, the reduced availability of amphibious shipping, and the reduced clarity of the operating environment, given the complexity of a globalized economy, are all challenges that were present in previous interwar periods.

The post war period that will follow operations in Afghanistan is unique to the aforementioned antebellum periods in several areas. The upcoming period will present challenges of increased complexity to Marine Corps leadership. Budget reductions of approximately thirty percent over an average period of six years post conflict occurred during the previously discussed

⁵⁷ Andrew Krepinevich, Barry Watts, and Robert Work, *Meeting the Anti-Access and Area-Denial Challenge*, report (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic & Budget Analysis, 2003), 4.

antebellum periods as well as those not discussed here: post Vietnam and post Desert Storm. The fiscal issues are different from previous post war reductions in a number of ways. First and most alarmingly, cuts have already been taken even though the United States is not out of conflict yet. Reductions began in 2010 and subsequent budgets have reflected additional reductions as well as projections for even deeper cuts. The potential for rapid and dramatic cuts loom over the defense establishment with the terms “fiscal cliff” and “sequestration” being used to signify significant and potentially long term and damaging defense budgetary reductions.⁵⁸ Additionally, political leaders are seemingly more concerned about debt reduction than defense capabilities. The immediate effect on the defense establishment has been the notable rework of the National Security Strategy of 2012 that removes the “two near simultaneous major regional contingencies” and replaces it with “one major contingency at a time.”⁵⁹

Materiel Challenges

To compound the fiscal crisis, the Department of Defense has deferred acquisitions that required replacement of aging critical capabilities redirecting resources to support targeted procurement that could impact directly the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Because of that, ancillary programs that have been in need of replacement will become untenable in the near future. Aerial refuelers, new generations fighter-attack aircraft, new ships (amphibious or otherwise), and ballistic missile submarines are just a few obvious programs that have been in need of replacement for a decade already.⁶⁰ The lack of availability of type specific ships for the Marine Corps is reminiscent of the post WWII period when the Navy rapidly decommissioned a

⁵⁸ Dobson, "The Marine Corps and the Coming Fiscal Reality."

⁵⁹ White House, *National Security Strategy*.

⁶⁰ Deputy Chief of Naval Operations, *Annual Report to Congress on Long Range Plan for Construction of Naval Vessels for FY2013*, 6.

large portion of its amphibious fleet. The combination of an aging amphibious fleet, additional pending defense reductions, and unplanned costs associated with ballistic submarine replacements have made the current 30-year shipbuilding plan unsupportable. The 30-year shipbuilding plan published in March 2012 stipulates that to be supportable, an increase vice a decrease in spending is required. The plan also lists the available amphibious shipping assets at 31 with the number decreasing according to plan to 28 in the next year and not returning to 31 for ten years.⁶¹ Interestingly, the Commandant of the Marine Corps stated in 2008 that the number of amphibious ships required to support operations, exercises, and contingencies was 38.⁶² Both numbers are less than what was required to conduct the amphibious landing at Inchon of two divisions. The limitations of amphibious shipping are even more egregious considering that the Korean War era did not have a requirement to provide constantly deployed forces amounting to about ten, (numbers fluctuate based on availability) amphibious ships to support the three deployed Marine Expeditionary Units. Another twenty ships are either returning from deployment or preparing to deploy. The shipping assets available for training are obviously constrained. In fact, pre WWI Marines had more amphibious ships available to train with than today's Marines do. As a result, aside from a relatively small portion of the Marine Corps assigned to amphibious operations at any one time (approximately 10,000 Marines) the other 170,000 active duty Marines do not receive the opportunity to gain or to maintain amphibious skill and experience. This is exacerbated by the fact that subsequent and more senior amphibious billets require experience, which precludes an even larger cross section of the population. The distinction between the Marine Corps and the Army, therefore, becomes more difficult to discern.⁶³

⁶¹ Ibid, 5.

⁶² Ibid, 4.

⁶³ Robert K. Dobson, "The Marine Corps and the Coming Fiscal Reality."

Doctrinal Challenges

Marine Corps doctrine has essentially remained unchanged since the mid-1980's. The central operating philosophy of maneuver warfare has served as the lynchpin for the capabilities based development of the Marine Corps. However, after 25 years and three wars, maneuver warfare may not be relevant in a world of security threats originating from failed and failing states, transnational terrorist organizations, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and the introduction of cyber as a domain of warfare. Only one of the core publications in the Marine Corps Doctrinal Series (MCDP), *MCDP 1-0 Operations*, has been significantly modified in the last fifteen years. Those modifications occurred over ten years ago and were mostly cosmetic. Many of the publications developed over the last 25 years are actually Army publications that have been dual designated as Marine Corps publications. While joint use publications support interoperability and promote cohesiveness between the services it does nothing to further the cause of the Marine Corps to uniquely identify itself as something more than another land army.⁶⁴

Organizational, Personnel, and Facilities Challenges

While serving as the Commandant after WWI, Major General Lejeune saw the need to restructure the central headquarters of the Marine Corps as well as the field command elements to better support warfare as fought in WWI. Other than a few minor changes, the basic organizational structure of the Marine Corps has not changed in over eighty years. The Marine Corps conducted numerous structure reviews to shape itself to fit the allocated budget. The two most recent reviews focused primarily on an increase in force size (2003 to 202,000) and then to reduce the force (2010 to 186,000).⁶⁵ The problem of structure and end strength, while

⁶⁴ Marine Corps Doctrine Division, Marine Corps Doctrine, accessed February 10, 2013, <https://www.mccdc.usmc.mil>.

⁶⁵ Marine Corps Force Structure Review Group, *Reshaping America's Expeditionary*

complicated, is well suited to analysis based on a list of factors. The evolution of amphibious capabilities since the Korean War has created a task-organized and adaptable force that provides the forward deployed and rapid response, multi-purpose force. The characteristics that make amphibious forces today so desirable - breadth, variable visibility, responsiveness, scalability, lethality, autonomy, mobility, persistence, flexibility, and versatility - should be inherent throughout the Marine Corps in every organization, deployed, operational, and garrison. Consideration should be given during any future structure discussions to tailor the force to highlight these strengths. The Marine Corps is capabilities based, not threat based. The organizational structure and equipment should be tailored for potential threats. The Marine Corps took on the difficult problems before they were insurmountable and in doing so was able to work through the challenges and difficulties prior to conflict by developing amphibious capabilities, small wars doctrine, helicopter operations, and evolving to support the potential operations Marines may be asked to execute. The Marine Corps must focus on the future and the difficult tasks ahead, not fall back on preparing for the last war fought.⁶⁶ The force size and structure problem quickly enters the complex arena when the budget predictions fail based on rapidly shifting priorities of fiscal hawks within Congress compounded by a national pivot in focus towards the Pacific Theater, an area that has largely been neglected during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

The Pacific Theater encompasses a more resource austere environment than Europe or the Middle East with a significantly wider area of operations that contains very lethal inhabitants - North Korea, China, India, and Pakistan - all of whom are focusing on expansion, not

Force in Readiness, report (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Navy, Headquarters United States Marine Corps, 2011).

⁶⁶ *Marine Corps Doctrinal Publications MCPD 1 Warfighting* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Navy, Headquarters United States Marine Corps, 1997), 53.

contraction, of their nation's interests. The current force structure for the Marine Corps in the Pacific is changing by dispersing Marines across numerous geographical locations throughout the Pacific Theater to better support the nation's refocus towards the Pacific. The quantity of available Marines in the entire Marine Corps to adequately support engagement and potentialities within the Pacific area is a definite concern. The facilities available to support the additional Marines in the new locations are a very real concern, especially given the current lack of resources. The second and third orders of effect and the interplay of solutions against unforeseen issues make the difficulties complex to the point that an optimal solution is unclear; only a potential compromise to address this series of concerns is possible. Even if answers present themselves to solve these complex issues, a significant level of institutional boldness will be required to execute whatever the solution is.

CONCLUSION

The Marine Corps must ask the hard questions regarding existing Doctrine, Organization, Training, Materiel, Leadership and Education, Personnel and Facilities (DOTMLPF). Established in Joint Forces doctrine, the DOTMLPF outlines the process that allows the Joint Requirements Oversight Committee (JROC) to make informed decisions on validation and prioritization of capability requirements. The individual services, including the Marine Corps, in order to comply with the joint standard for capabilities analysis, have adopted the process.⁶⁷ Since its establishment with the National Reorganization Act of 1947, the Defense Department has continually strived to integrate the forces and ensure interoperability with military formations. The Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 further enmeshed the individual services. It has arguably chipped away at the individuality and unique service capabilities each service has heralded as justification for conducting business as usual. The challenge for the Marine Corps has always

⁶⁷ Stanley A. McChrystal, Lieutenant General, Chief of Staff, *Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction 3170.01G* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, 2009).

been to uniquely identify itself against other services while at the same time not getting too far out of tolerance with the joint mandates required of each service. This challenge is exacerbated during post war periods that trend towards restricted resources, downsizing of manpower, and an unclear future operating environment. Since just after WWI, the Marine Corps has worked diligently to define itself as an amphibious force that retains a forward deployed presence while simultaneously maintaining a capability to deploy follow on and reinforcing forces rapidly. Inherent challenges to amphibious capabilities identified and addressed by previous generations of Marine leaders established the doctrine, equipment, operational concept, and legal framework that sustained the service up to this point.

The checklist mentality associated with deployments regarding training, education, and preparation lends more towards not failing than it does towards winning.⁶⁸ The boldness of the Marine Corps during previous periods of crisis was categorized by rapid doctrine development (amphibious, helicopter, and small wars), innovative problem solving to develop capabilities (amphibious equipment, helicopters, vertical envelopment), and aggressive leadership at all levels that focused on providing a ready and relevant amphibious capability. The Marine Corps leadership was able to develop the solutions to difficult problems despite budget restrictions, inter-service rivalry, and the near constant threat of disestablishment of the Marine Corps. The challenges and problems listed above are surmountable only if there is bold leadership that is willing to acknowledge and take risks just as the generations of Marine leaders did during critical periods in the interwar periods after WWI, WWII, and Korea.

The Marine Corps' struggles for relevance and continuance over the last 237 years highlight numerous critical moments. Three of the more significant moments - post WWI, post WWII, and post Korean War - discussed above included the significant events that Marines

⁶⁸ Dobson, "The Marine Corps and the Coming Fiscal Reality."

struggled with and eventually overcame thereby ensuring the survival of the Marine Corps. The leaders during those critical periods identified the Marine Corps' niche within the defense establishment and worked to position the service as value added vice a competitor for the shrinking available resources. Not merely fighting for existence for perpetuity's sake, the leaders navigated the Marine Corps to fill a critical position that while required by the nation, was not able to be filled adequately by any other service. Doctrine, amphibious heritage, and a culture of boldness and innovation have served the Marine Corps well during these critical moments in its history. However, the upcoming antebellum period may prove to be more challenging than anything the Marine Corps has faced to date. In order to survive and thrive in the coming interwar period, the Marine Corps must possess the institutional agility and boldness to face and overcome challenges. Without that vision and boldness there exists a very real potential to reduce or remove altogether the Marine Corps and with it the amphibious capability currently serving as a strategic shaping asset within the national security strategy.

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